

COASTAL BIRDS

There are more than 125 species of birds, mainly waterfowl, water birds, and raptors that rely on the Long Island Sound estuary system for food and habitat. Bird populations in and near the Sound vary seasonally. In winter, birders delight at large concentrations of mergansers, scaups, scoters, mallards, black ducks, loons, cormorants, and Canada geese. Spring brings the annual migration of a wide variety of plovers, terns, sandpipers, waterfowl, herons, egrets, and songbirds. During the summer months, birds are busy tending their nests and young. Fall, once again, brings masses of birds migrating along the coast on their way to southern wintering grounds.



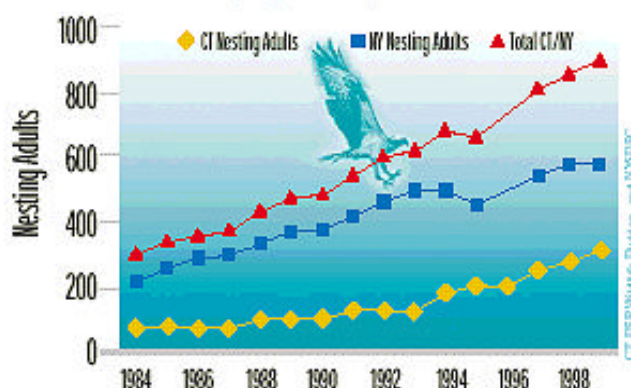
Photo by CJ Sam Grant

Osprey Nesting Adults

Ospreys are fish-eating birds of prey that live throughout the world. The availability of fish, water conditions, and health of the environment directly affects the health, reproduction, and nesting success of the Sound's osprey population. Ospreys are important indicators of the health and integrity of the Sound, since they are high in the marine and coastal food web.

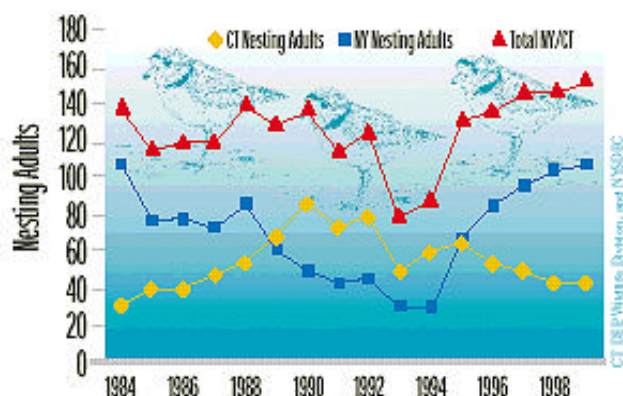
The osprey population around Long Island Sound fell sharply during the 1950s and 1960s due to the effects of pesticides, particularly DDT. Since the ban on DDT, which occurred during the 1970s, and the placement of nesting platforms in wetlands all along the Sound, the osprey population has been making a recovery.

Osprey Nesting Adults



CT DEP Wildlife Division, and NYS DEC

Piping Plover Nesting Adults



CT DEP Wildlife Division, and NYS DEC

Piping Plover Populations

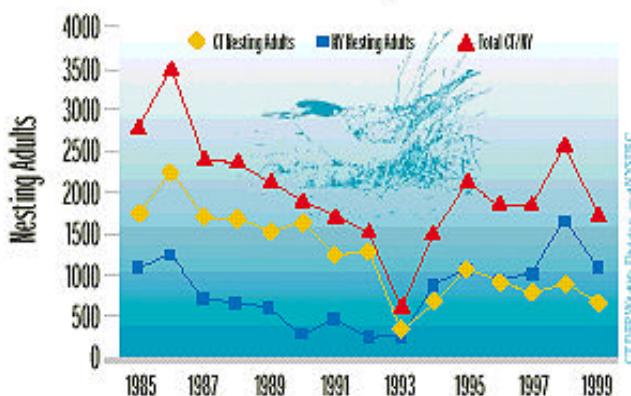
Piping plovers are small shorebirds that nest on beaches, often with least terns. Their nesting and reproduction are threatened by human intrusion, storm tides, and predators. Since protection and monitoring efforts began in 1984, nesting success has improved, resulting in more returning adults in subsequent years. The piping plover was given federal threatened species status in 1986.

Least Tern Populations

The least tern is likely to be seen around the Sound from May to early August. They were hunted to near-extinction for the hat trade in the 1800s. Numbers rebounded after hunting was banned. More recently, disturbances, loss of habitat, and habitat degradation are affecting the population of least terns in the Sound area. The least tern population fluctuated over the last fifteen years, with relatively lower numbers present during the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Overall, between 1985 and 1997, there has been no statistically significant trend.

Least terns have been on the rebound from an all-time low of 610 birds in 1993.

Least Tern Nesting Adults



CT DEP Wildlife Division, and NYS DEC